



Montgomery Rx Underway

The Montgomery Rx program we announced in late September to help county residents cope with the high price of prescription drugs is now underway. Free discount drug cards have been mailed to more than 200,000 households in the County. Those who haven't received a card in the mail may pick one up at any County Public Library, regional services center, County Health and Human Services location or at any of the 120 participating pharmacies in Montgomery County.

The cards, which offer an average savings of 20 percent off the retail price of commonly prescribed drugs, can be used by all county residents, regardless of age, income level or existing health coverage. Higher discounts may be available on mail order prescription drugs. A key part of controlling skyrocketing health care costs is controlling the high costs of medications, and the Montgomery Rx plan is a "no hassle" way to do that. I'm

committed to allowing our residents to realize the greatest possible savings on prescription medications.

Expanded Health Care for the Uninsured

The new Montgomery Cares plan we announced earlier this month represents a major expansion of health care coverage for uninsured residents of Montgomery County. The goal of the plan is to nearly quadruple the number of individuals being served through a network of private health clinics over the next five years.

No one should have to forego needed medical care because they can't afford to pay for it, yet today we have thousands in our community who lack health care. Montgomery Cares will help us reach our goal of providing needed care for all. Under an innovative partnership with local hospitals, community-based health clinics and health care professionals, we will provide primary and specialty care – as well as prescription medications – to our most needy and vulnerable residents. Dental care and behavioral health services will be included as part of a pilot project.

Taxicab Reform Legislation Passes

The new taxicab reform legislation I proposed earlier this year and passed recently by the County Council will dramatically change the way cabs are regulated in the county. It will also increase competition and improve customer service, because it implements new safeguards that guarantee access to more responsive and safer taxi service to our residents. I commend the Council for approving this legislation and thank Action in Montgomery (AIM) for its leadership in spearheading the reform.

Improving Air Quality

One of my priorities for the 2005 Maryland General Assembly Session is passage of an air quality bill that will limit emissions from coal-fired power plants. It's time that we in Maryland join many other states on the east coast that have aggressive strategies for improving air quality.

During the 2004 session, a bill limiting emissions of nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury and carbon dioxide – known as the Four Pollutant Bill – failed to make it out of committee in the House. Our County Air Quality Strategy calls for support of multi-pollution legislation at both the state and federal levels that would require air emission reductions for all power plants. Reducing nitrogen oxides and mercury will also improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. This is legislation that can affect all Marylanders and I look forward to working to help move it forward this year.

State of the County Speech

As part of my 2004 State of the County speech, I unveiled several new initiatives designed to enhance the areas of small business development, education, public safety, the environment and affordable housing. A summary of these initiatives is below:

Further Improve K-12 and Higher Education:

- Accelerate the expansion of all-day kindergarten, class-size reduction and accountability efforts.
- Create the position of Higher Education Advisor to the County Executive. This person will spearhead efforts to bring together business, government and the education



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community to review current higher education assets and to nurture current and future partnerships; and

- Prepare a vision and strategic plan for the next 10 years that will strengthen and expand affordable and accessible higher education opportunities in Montgomery County.

Strengthen Public Safety:

- Over the next five years, hire an average of 50 new police personnel a year to continue implementing sophisticated policing strategies that can reach out over the entire County.

Improve Environmental Quality:

- Promote the construction of “Green Buildings” in Montgomery County to reduce the environmental impacts that buildings have on their surroundings by:
 - Establishing a multi-agency public-private task force to eliminate regulatory barriers to green building; and
 - Establish marketing support for family farms;
 - Increasing agricultural education in our schools; and
 - Strengthening the transferable development rights program.

Support Small and Minority Businesses:

- Create the position of Small and Minority Business liaison whose sole job will be to find partnership and collaboration opportunities for small and minority business owners;
- Recapitalize the highly successful small and minority business revolving loan fund to help companies finance their business plans; and
- Plan and develop a new Small business incubator- a facility that will give young, start-up disadvantaged companies the infrastructure and services they need to survive at a very low cost.

Strengthen Immigrant Communities:

- Building on the success of the County’s first day-laborer employment site, open a second site in the Wheaton area to help match workers with work.

Increase Affordable Housing:

- Increase to more than \$20 million the amount of money in the County’s dedicated housing fund to continue progress in preserving an average of 3,000 affordable housing units a year.